UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE — Radio Service — OFFICE OF INFORMATION

HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Monday, November 1, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "A DANGEROUS NEW DRUG." Information from the Food and Drug Administration, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

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Friends, this week's letter from our Washington correspondent starts by saying:

"The entire force of the Federal Food and Drug Administration is tracing shipments of the poisonous drug which brought death to nine patients in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and five in East St. Louis, Illinois, recently. Immediately upon report of the poisoning, officers of the Administration were sent to Tulsa and to the manufacturer's main establishment and branch houses.

"About 700 shipments of the medicine are being located for seizure by Federal agencies or by cooperating State and city authorities. The medicinal agent in the preparation is reported to be sulfanilamid, (sul-fan-il-a-mid) a newly developed drug which has been widely used in the treatment of infections. The preparation in question is reported to have consisted of a so-called exlixir, in which the sulfanilamid was dissolved in another compound known as diethylene glycol. (di-ethyl-ene gly-col).

"Sulfanilamid was recenlty found to have very remarkable benefical qualities in certain types of infection, but medical authorities have issued repeated warnings against its indiscriminate use.

"In commenting on this latest case, Mr. W. G. Campbell, Chief of the Food and Drug Administration, said: 'We do not as yet know the explanation of the fatalities. In has been reported that the solvent, diethylene glycol, is probably the responsible agent. We do know that there was something radically wrong.

"'It is unfortunate,' -- I am still quoting Dr. Campbell, 'that under the terms of our present inadequate Federal law, the Food and Drug Administration is obliged to proceed against this product on a technical and trivial charge of misbranding. Nevertheless we propose, as a public health measure, to seize every outstanding consignment of this drug that we can find, and to enlist the cooperation of State and city authorities where any lots are encountered that have passed out of Federal jurisdication. We intend to communicate with the Canadian authorities regarding any lots which may have been distributed in that country, in order that they may take appropriate steps.'

"Mr. Campbell continues: 'This occurrence emphasizes how essential it is to public welfare that the distribution of highly potent drugs should be controlled by an adequate Federal Food and Drug law. While every possible effort

under our present legal authority is being made to safeguard the public health in connection with the distribution of this deadly preparation, we should not lose sight of the fact that there have been several similar cases of deaths and permanent physical injury resulting from uncontrolled distribution of new and relatively untried drug preparations.'

"Mr. Campbell illustrated this point by mentioning dinitrophenol, which was recklessly placed on the market some years ago. Deaths and blindness from the use of dinitrophenol are continuing today, he said. Cinchophen is another powerful drug, often recommended for rheumatism. But it can cause death from damage to the liver. He also spoke of thyroid and radium preparations improperly administered to the public. Both of these can cause unfortunate poisoning, acute and chronic. He believes that the only remedy for such a situation is the enactment by Congress of an adequate and comprehensive national Food and Drugs Act which shall require that all medicines placed upon the market shall be safe to use under the directions for use. For potent drugs and new drugs, Mr. Campbell thinks a Federal licensing system is probably the answer.

Our letter writer continues with a bit of information which was new to me, and may be, to you.

"Did you know," she writes, "that there are only about 100 Food and Drug inspectors to cover the whole United States? And in addition to administering the Food and Drugs Act for about three-fourths of their time, they must give the remainder of their attention to cases coming under the Insecticide Act, the Caustic Poison Act, the Import Milk Act, the Tea Act, and the Naval Stores Act. You can see they are very busy men. These inspectors also work closely with State food and health officials.

"The various field stations of the Food and Drug Administration have laboratories where suspicious samples are analyzed. They are located at points which are centers of trade and transportation, such as New York, Chicago, New Orleans, Seattle, San Francisco, St. Louis, and Boston. For some of the bacteriological and chemical analyses the inspectors use a trailer laboratory. For example, near Washington, D.C. just now, the Food and Drug inspectors assigned to inspect shipments of vegetables and fruits for excess spray residue buy samples from the trucks entering the city. In their trailer laboratory they can analyze the samples on the spot, and send advance word to the receiving point if the shipment does not meet legal requirements. It is encouraging to learn that out of 850 official samples of fruit collected recently, less than 25 were found to be seizable. In a similar way, trailer laboratory work greatly facilitated the examination of samples during the investigation of the crab meat industry in Chesapeake Bay, a short time ago."

That concludes our Food and Drug news for this week.

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